

2016 Italy: Tour for Susan, Francis & (SOs)

Monday October 24 (NYC)-Tuesday October 25 (Milan)

Delta 418 business class NY/JFK to Milan/MXP, followed by express train to **Cadorna station** and taxi to **Gran Duca di York** hotel for **4 nights**.



Wednesday October 26 (Milan)

Quiet morning. Went to the Hokusai, Hiroshige, Utamaro exhibit at the **Palazzo Reale**. Skipped the visit to the rooftops and spires of the Duomo. We walked by the national stock exchange – there is a huge sculpture of a raised middle finger right outside.

We met **Anna** from Tours of Milan at the Duomo for **Best of Milan Half Day Tour & Last Supper Visit (3 hours)**. It included the **Duomo Cathedral**, one of the biggest Cathedrals in the world. The Duomo Cathedral was built in six centuries. Then the "**Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II**", a 19th century glass vaulted shopping arcade, one of the first examples of Art Nouveau Style in the world, and still called "the living room of the Milanese", because it was the meeting point of Artists, Poets, and Men of Letters in the 19th century in its bar and cafès (which still exist).

On to the Square of **La Scala Theatre Opera House**, one of the biggest and most modern Theatres in the world since 1776, when it was made by Giuseppe Piermarini, then the most important architect in Milan. Then, **Sforza Castle: the Fortress of Milan**, a majestic Medieval Castle. Finally, **Leonardo's Last Supper**.



Thursday October 27 (Milan/Brescia/Milan)

Took a train from Milano Centrale to Brescia, where we met [Valentina Panozzo](#).



She gave us a 3-hour tour of Brescia, including the Capitolium, Piazza Loggia, a renaissance square and piazza Paolo VI with the stunning Duomo Vecchio. Then on to the S. Giulia museum, the most important museum of the city with a great roman collection.

Founded over 3,200 years ago, Brescia (in antiquity Brixia) has been an important regional centre since pre-Roman times. Its old town contains the best-preserved Roman public buildings in northern Italy and numerous monuments, among these the medieval castle, the Old and New cathedral, the Renaissance *Piazza della Loggia* and the rationalist *Piazza della Vittoria*. The monumental archaeological area of the Roman forum and the monastic complex of San Salvatore-Santa Giulia have become a UNESCO World Heritage Site as part of a group of seven inscribed as Longobards in Italy, Places of Power

Valentina was great. She even advised us about buying regional day tickets for the train which saved the 4 of us about 80 euros. We returned to Milan by afternoon train.

Friday October 28 (Milan/Ravenna/Milan)

Took Trenitalia Milan-Bologna-Ravenna. It's 3 hours, but Ravenna is worth it as the mosaics (from c430 to c590) are astonishing, and astonishingly preserved.



We met **Silvia Belletti** (not without some difficulty, as she was difficult to confirm with on the day of) at the main square for a 3-hour tour.

We walked to the Basilica of St Vitale and the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, visited by Dante Alighieri's tomb and the church of Saint Francis, and finished with the Basilica of Saint Apollinare the New.

Silvia is a professor. We can tell... 😊



We took Trenitalia back in the evening, and the local was late so we missed the high speed connection. Locals helped us, and told us to take any train, and we ended up only about 20 minutes late back to Milan (although we stood for the final hour). Back around 9:30pm.

Saturday October 29 (Milan/Naples)

Flew Easyjet Naples, taxi to Hotel Il Convento for 6 nights. It's a modest place, but with a great location and terrific service from the desk staff (restaurants, transport, etc).



Sunday October 30 (Naples)

Took the Circumvesuviana train to **Pompeii** and met the guide from [Tours of Pompeii](#). We spent 3 days with their guides (Fiorenza, Maurizio & Fabio) and every tour was great.

In a 2.5-hour private tour, Fiorenza selected the highlights, such as the theatre with its marble decoration, the thermal baths, the roman avenue of Pompeii with its shops, the "pleasure house" and more. It was a view of Roman life 2000 years ago.



Monday October 31 (Naples)

We walked to the **Archeological Museum** and met Maurizio for another private tour. It's a fabulous museum but way too much to figure out on our own. Having a guide to hit the highlights was a real plus. Had a terrible (OK, exceedingly average) lunch in a beautiful outdoor square nearby.

Tuesday November 1 (Naples)

We again took the Circumvesuviana train, this time to **Herculaneum (Ercolano)** and met Fabio from **Tours of Pompeii**. Ercolano was filled with harder volcanic material than Pompeii (not ash). The result is that there is less excavated, but it is in better condition, and there are some unique details such as the original doors and all the original furniture of the shops.



Wednesday November 2 (Naples)

Gerry from **Sorrento First Choice** picked us up at 8:30 and gave us some local color as we drove to the Amalfi coast, passing San Marzano (tomatoes), and Gragnano (pasta) on the way. Along the coast, we saw great views.

Positano is situated on limestone cliffs, and we walked around a bit. Traveling to Amalfi we saw the small villages of Praiano - the summer residence of the Amalfi doges and place of production of silks - and Furore, named because during the stormy nights the noise of the sea was very loud.

We stopped in Amalfi for the cathedral and a walk. We passed through Atrani on the way to Ravello, one of the most attractive destinations on the Amalfi Coast. Most of Ravello's monuments date back to the 11th to 13th centuries, when Arab-Sicilian art reached its peak. The Villa Rufolo functioned as a watch tower in ancient times. We walked through the gardens and enjoyed the views of the coastline, then returned to hotel at 4:30.



Thursday November 3 (Naples)

Hung out in Naples! Walked the waterfront, toured the Teatro Di San Carlo (1737). Bought a watch (see prior post).

Friday November 4 (Naples/Perugia)

Took Trenitalia from Naples to Foligno (change in Rome), where GianLuca Siena transferred us to Perugia. Learned about the efficiency of Italian IT (also prior post). Arrived at the Hotel Locanda Della Posta for 3 nights.



Saturday November 5 (Perugia)

Gianluca drove us to **Assisi** for a terrific tour with Cristiana (<http://www.love-umbria.com/>).

Assisi was the birthplace of St. Francis (1181–1226), one of Italy's patron saints. The Basilica of St. Francis is a massive, 2-level church, consecrated in 1253. Its 13th-century frescoes portraying the life of St. Francis have been attributed to Giotto and Cimabue, among others. The crypt houses the saint's stone sarcophagus. Frescoes are incredible. (Cristiana went with us for lunch at [Osteria Piazzetta dell Erba](#) – and it was great.)



Sunday November 6 (Perugia)

We walked around **Perugia**. It's the capital of the Umbria region. It's known for its defensive walls around the historic center. The medieval Priori Palace exhibits regional art from the 13th century onward. Looking onto Piazza IV Novembre, the Gothic cathedral houses Renaissance paintings and frescoes. In the square's center, Fontana Maggiore is a marble fountain with carvings of biblical scenes and zodiac signs.



Monday November 7 (Perugia/Siena)

Gianluca took us to visit **Montepulciano**, **Pienza** and **San Quirico D'Orcia** (without tours), and then transferred us on to Siena to check in to the Hotel Athena for 4 nights.

The Val d'Orcia is a valley so beautiful it's been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Montepulciano is a historical medieval and Renaissance town, with its churches and the Medici fortress restored by Antonio da Sangallo the Elder. The area is known for its *Vino Nobile di Montepulciano*.



Then **Pienza**, the jewel of the Val d'Orcia. It has 15th century architecture and a position on the summit of the lovely hills that have made Tuscany famous. Great views from the balcony overlooking the town walls. The characteristic trapezoidal town square is framed by many masterpieces of the architect Bernardo Rossellino, such as the Piccolomini Palace with its beautiful garden, the Borgia Palace and the Cathedral. Shops sell pecorino (sheep cheese) and wine. We tasted a Pecorino coated in olive wood ash – excellent.

Third was **San Quirico d'Orcia**, with Etruscan origins, the oldest town of the itinerary. We walked through town to the Church of San Francesco and the Horti Leonini realized in 1580 by Diomedes Leoni, a classic example of an Italian garden.



Tuesday November 8 (Siena)

We self-toured **Siena**.

Main sights included: The Siena Cathedral (Duomo), begun in the 12th century, a masterpiece of Italian Romanesque-Gothic architecture. Its main façade was completed in 1380. The original plan called for an ambitiously massive basilica, the largest then in the world. Scarcity of funds caused the creation of a subdued version. The east wall of the abandoned original folly of a nave still stands; through an internal staircase, visitors can climb for a grand view of the city. We climbed this, and there is a great view.

The Siena Cathedral Pulpit is an octagonal 13th-century masterpiece sculpted by Nicola Pisano with lion pedestals and biblical bas-relief panels. The inlaid marble mosaic floor of the cathedral, designed and labored on by many artists, is among the most elaborate in Italy. Visited the Sacristy, Piccolomini library and subterranean baptistry.

Stopped in the Piazza del Campo, the shell-shaped town square, in front of the Palazzo Pubblico with its tall Torre del Mangia. This is part of the site for the Palio horse race. 2 of us climbed the tower (don't) and 2 of us had pastry and coffee in the square (also sort of don't).



Wednesday November 9 (Siena)

Gianluca picked us up and took us to **San Gimignano** for a half-day guided tour. San Gimignano is an Italian hill town in Tuscany, southwest of Florence. Encircled by 13th-century walls, its old town centers on Piazza della Cisterna, a triangular square lined with medieval houses. Other medieval features include fountains and towers, such as the stone Torre Grossa. The Duomo di San Gimignano is a 12th-century church with frescoes by Ghirlandaio in its Santa Fina Chapel.



Thursday November 10 (Siena)

Free day in Siena. Francis was *supposed to* do our laundry.



Friday November 11 (Siena/La Spezia)

Gianluca picked us up. We travelled to **Pisa** (for an unguided tour) and on to **Lucca** (for a guided tour). Most miserable weather of the trip – pouring rain and cold.

Still, Pisa is best known for its iconic Leaning Tower, and the tower and surrounding buildings are quite beautiful – better than I anticipated based on the hype about it. Already tilting when it was completed in 1372, the 56m white-marble cylinder is the bell tower of the Romanesque, striped-marble cathedral that rises next to it in the Piazza dei Miracoli. Also in the piazza is the Baptistry, and the Caposanto Monumentale cemetery.



Lucca is a city known for the well-preserved Renaissance walls encircling its historic city center and its cobblestone streets. Broad, tree-lined pathways along the tops of these massive 16th- and 17th-century ramparts are popular for strolling and cycling.

Then we drove on to La Spezia and the Cinque Terre, and checked in to the Hotel Firenze Continentale for 3 nights.



Saturday November 12 (La Spezia/Cinque Terre)

Self-toured the Cinque Terre. We took the train from La Spezia to Monterosso Al Mare and hiked from there to Vernazza – 2+ hours, and a good bit of vertical gain/loss. Walked around Vernazza, then took the train to the next town. Decent lunch (fresh grilled fish). Debating taking the second link in the hikes, we skipped it, although we did take the remaining part of the path out of Vernazza toward Corniglia.



Sunday November 13 (La Spezia/Cinque Terre)

Self-toured Portovenere.

Portovenere's main sights include the seafront, with colorful side-by-side buildings, and the Gothic Church of St. Peter, consecrated in 1198. It was built over a pre-existing 5th century Palaeo-Christian church, which had rectangular plan and semicircular apse. The new part, from the 13th century, is marked externally by black and white stripes. The Romanesque church of St. Lawrence was erected in 1098 by the Genoese. It probably occupies the site of ancient temple dedicated to Jupiter. The church was damaged by a fire in 1340 and by the Aragonese attack in 1494, and was further restored in 1582.

Monday November 14 (La Spezia/Cinque Terre)

We spent the morning in La Spezia, checking out what we may have missed in the prior to days, including the market, and apparently running our ATM cards through skimmers. Skipping the train, we arranged a car service to take us to Milan Malpensa airport to check in to Holiday Inn Express for 1 night.



Tuesday November 15 (Milan/New York)

Took the shuttle to Malpensa, and flew Delta 419 to JFK, where T&S had car service and S&F went on to meet family in the city.

Week of November 14 (Milan)

The 4 of us get \$3000 worth of bogus ATM charges on our cards – in Milan, after we have left the country. Not enough to ruin a great trip!!